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ABSTRACT

Adolescent pregnancy (AP) is explored from historical and policy perspectives. The "epidemic" of AP, with 4 out of every 10 teenage girls becoming pregnant, is typically portrayed as a recent and unprecedented problem that requires massive federal intervention, but the problem is not new. Chapter 1 analyzes adolescent sexuality, AP, and childbearing in early America, when Americans paid little attention to such issues because they occurred relatively infrequently compared to the current situation, even though rates of AP and childbearing peaked in the late 1950s. Chapters 2 and 3 review policies addressing AP, and trace the origins and development of the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs. Chapter 4 discusses the historical controversy over parental notification of the distribution of contraceptives to teenagers. Chapter 5 discusses the impact of a parental notification requirement from a social science viewpoint. Chapter 6 considers the role of young fathers. Chapter 7 critiques major evaluations of care programs for pregnant teens and adolescent mothers. Chapter 8 reviews the problems and suggests solutions. Neither AP nor early childbearing is a recent epidemic, unprecedented in U.S. history. Early sexual activity, AP, abortion, and teenage childbearing will continue unless the history of the problem and the efficacy of attempts to solve it are carefully studied. Included are 12 figures and 278 references. (SLD)

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